



[Alexandria Beautification Commission](#) | P.O. Box 178 | Alexandria, VA 22313
facebook.com/AlexandriaBeautification & instagram.com/beautifulalx

Meeting minutes

Thursday, September 12, 2024 @ 7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Charles Houston Recreation Center | 901 Wythe St

Present in person: Leah Bancheri, Steven Cohen, Elizabeth (Liz) Gelfer (Vice Chair), Kenneth Krupa, Laura Norfolk, Eleanor Quigley, Yanique Revers, Sara E. Rhoades, Daniya Tamendarova (Secretary), Eleanor Trice (Chair); Oscar Mendoza (City Staff)

Present remotely: N/A

Excused absence: Felicia Hackett, Monica Murphy, Emily Swaim

Unexcused absence: Maralyn O'Brien

The meeting began at 7:32 pm.

1. Approval of [August 14 meeting minutes](#)

Ken moved to approve August 14 meeting minutes, **Sara** seconded. Approved unanimously.

2. Meeting guest

Eleanor Quigley introduced Gordon, an urban farmer, who lives near Four Mile Run Park and The Birchmere. Gordon is growing vegetables along the Birchmere property line (and supplying a small group of families with vegetables)—a narrow strip of land, about a block and a half—and is looking for some help from the Commission with gardening, possibly cultivating an adjacent area and beautifying the space.

Eleanor Trice will provide Gordon's info to Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, asking for their help with the garden.

Steve: We've been talking about engaging with Alexandria public schools, so that could be another group to draw on, once we have contacts in place.

Sara: I am part of a community garden that was started by a Master Gardener, now maintained by members of the Del Ray community and nearby school. It would be a good idea to engage with the Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia to plan the garden and develop plans for its care/assistance to Gordon.

3. Vote on meetings at Durant Center, 1605 Cameron St, Alexandria

Eleanor T: At the August meeting, which was held at Durant Center, we agreed to vote on potentially moving ABC monthly meetings to Durant Center from Houston.

Oscar provided some background about Durant Center: It was the site for ABC meetings for 14 years. There is music practice next door every second Thursday, but it did not seem to interfere with ABC meetings.

Ken moved to stay in current location (Houston) until the end of this year and then move to Durant in January. **Laura** seconded. Approved unanimously.

4. Subcommittee reports

- **Education Subcommittee** update – Sara (15-20 min)

Sara reported on social media statistics: On Instagram, we have been growing followers by about 50 every month, now at 1,584. Reels are getting the most interactions. The Interview with **Monica** about the green roof—recommended by **Ken**—is the top reel for the month (with over 500 views).

For future posts, **Laura** will be sending recommendations about plant sales and markets, **Daniya** will continue to post about art, **Sara** will continue to post about sustainability, and **Yanique** will continue to provide awards posts – **Sara** is making reels out of pictures of award-winning properties, taken by **Liz**.

Leading up to the **Awards ceremony**, the Subcommittee will focus on the awardees, requesting short videos from awardees to post on social media and on the ABC website.

Sara and **Leah** will record short interviews with attendees and stream the ceremony on Fb and Instagram. Will identify 5-10 awardees for more in-depth interviews.

The **ABC website is being updated**. Katie Bishop, our previous contact, left mid-way. The new contacts are providing confusing directions about photographs they'd like us to provide (e.g.,

providing private photos rather than using iStock or similar repository of professional images). **Oscar** will intercede to clarify approach.

Sara met with the **Zebra editor**, who remains committed to allotting 1 page to ABC in every issue. Our page focused on the awards for the last couple of months. For the upcoming month, **Yanique** will provide a short blurb about the awards (though the ceremony is not open to the public, we will be streaming it on social media); **Sara** finalized an article about how to optimize one's property for winning the beautification award; **Eleanor Q.** may write a short article about what to plant in the fall.

Streaming videos at the last year's Awards ceremony was difficult because of poor sound. The Education Subcommittee recommends obtaining microphones – **Oscar** asked **Sara** for links to examples of recommended microphones for the City to consider purchasing.

Eleanor T and **Liz** met with City Arborist **Phil Jubert**, who is planning to reach 1000 tree plantings this year. This info could be highlighted on the ABC website. One of Phil's KPIs was the ratio between trees planted and trees removed – this year, performance has been particularly strong.

Ken: Do we know who will accept the award for the mural? **Eleanor T:** Nicole Bourgea, one of the artists, will be at the ceremony – it'd be great to have an interview with the artist and the real estate contacts who commissioned the work.

- **Awards ceremony** update & responsibilities – Yanique (15-20 min)

Yanique: We have ~60 attendees confirmed. 14 key invitees are still outstanding among awardees and City Council.

Big shoutout to **Liz** who amassed so many donations for the event (e.g., donations of wine, treats, plants from local businesses).

Yanique passed around signup sheets for tasks prior to the event starting on the Awards day.

Sara will pick up ice.

Ken will place parking signs about where to park.

Leah and Sara will oversee food and beverage setup.

Eleanor Q will be the greeter.

Photographer – **Sara** will reach out to *Zebra* about sending a photographer (last year, they didn't show up), possibly others. Yanique reached out to *Alexandria Times* with no response.

Staff registration table – **Eleanor T.** noted that Emily Swain did it last year and may like to do it again (Emily was absent from the ABC meeting).

After registration, leading key City and Awardee invitees to their seats – **Maralyn.**

AV, PPT – **Yanique**

Timekeeper – **Ken**

Greet photographer – **Leah/Sarah**

Everyone available for tear down.

Posting photos on social media after events – the Education Subcommittee.

Liz invites ABC members to look at The Garden website to see what the location is like (capacity of about 120 people), with tables, a stage, a bar area, and a table for partners (e.g., Master Gardeners, Tree Stewards, Urban Foresters), a photo area with ABC logo (possibly a good area for videos, photos). An outdoor space with lighting and seating is available; there is also a small, quieter room that may be used for video interviews.

Eleanor T: The poet laureate will read her poem about Alexandria; Phil Jubert will speak after her; the Vice Mayor and Sarah Bagley will also speak.

Ken/Laura wanted to make sure that food will meet diverse diets (e.g., gluten-free, vegetarian, avoid major allergens like nuts) – **Liz:** yes.

- **Sustainability/advocacy** update – Eleanor Q/Monica (15-20 min)

Fall plantings will be on the following Saturdays from 9am - 12 pm

Sept 28 – Mt Jefferson Park

Oct 19 – Four Mile Run Park

Nov 9 – Locations along Cameron Run

Eleanor Q., with **Liz**, went to see the tree farm where our donated trees come from, Clear Ridge Tree Farm, specializing in all-native trees. They were able to pick out trees for the Mt. Jefferson Park planting—and were happy to get a diverse list of plants from our wish list (34 trees, 17 species).

Ken Moser, the Conservator of Four Mile Run Park, will pick trees for that park's plantings.

Nov. 9 location trees will be selected by the City.

Monica, Eleanor Q., and former ABC members **Richard Dorrier** were pleased with Welcome Gateways planting designs; plantings will begin in October and continue into spring/fall 2025; the City's landscaping company will guarantee the plants and their care.

Money is handled through Capitol Improvement Fund because it's a major initiative on behalf of the City.

Eleanor Q. will email the details to ABC members.

Steve: Is there a plan to have a ribbon cutting ceremony with City officials at one of the earlier?

Eleanor Q.: Many of these are in high-traffic areas, so that may be difficult.

Ken: Given this high investment from the City, do we have expectations of plant care?

Oscar: Yes, the City landscaper is liable for plants (i.e., ongoing upkeep and replacing dead plants).

Yanique: Are volunteers for plantings welcome?

Eleanor Q: Yes, absolutely.

Ken: Volunteer Alexandria could help spread the word. (Sara and the Education Subcommittee will be sure to promote the plantings and ways to volunteer.)

- **Update on other key initiatives** – Eleanor T. (20 min)

Eleanor T.: We got approval from Fort Ward to replace dead plants around the Arborist Memorial area (e.g., with a dogwood), add a plaque and make that space look better. ABC will be an ongoing steward for the memorial and will work with the City to make other annual improvements to the area. We will also schedule a photo op for the memorial after updates have been made.

Judy Lo suggested installing a plaque – **Eleanor T.** is looking into this and will bring options to ABC, when ready.

From ideas discussed with Sarah Bagley:

West End city development plans – especially on parking lots and heat islands. **Eleanor T.** looked up ordinances in other cities – e.g., a tree per 6-10 parking spaces, permeable hardscaping, perimeter plantings for existing parking lots, tax incentives for existing properties. Eleanor would like to outline several recommendations.

Eleanor Q.: The City itself needs to be a leader on this by using such practices itself – e.g., the new High School parking lots have no shade; Patric Henry Rec Center – with a new parking lot that, again, has no shade.

Oscar: Planning and Zoning looks at permits and developer obligations. ABC could discuss this with Planning and Zoning.

Steve/Laura: Balance should be struck between encouragement and harsh requirements.

Eleanor T.: Helping underserved/distressed properties – **Liz** and **Eleanor T.** talked with City Arborist **Phil Jubert** and trying to get a meeting with the Office on Housing for advice of specific areas for an initiative like this. Eleanor T. suggests a proactive, ongoing tree equity program to get tree canopy in lower-income areas that have heat islands. The city currently reactively

responds to 311 requests for tree plantings (with a required 3 feet area); the tree equity program would help underserved areas with heat islands get more trees.

Leah: Can 311 line be used by elderly/disabled citizens to request help with their properties?

Laura: Office of Senior Services would help with that.

Steve: Can the money remaining from 311 line budget be used for helping distressed properties?

Oscar: Any budget surplus would need to be reviewed/approved by City Manager.

Eleanor T: Sarah Bagley recommended against going directly door to door and instead making information about services available (and work with agencies and organizations to help amplify their messages).

Laura: This may be veering beyond ABC remit.

Eleanor T.: We could leverage resources already available in the City, including from private sector, and broadcast this.

Eleanor T. will send around some ideas. **Oscar:** ABC can submit a memo to City Council, providing a list of ideas and possibly a recommendation for budgetary needs/sources for Sarah Bagley to push at the Council.

Oscar: To clarify, ABC cannot submit a *proposal* but can provide recommendations.

- **October meeting** – discuss any legislative recommendations

Monica is planning to resign from the commission but still would like to see through the Gateways project.

Ken: Motion to designate Monica as an advisor to ABC. **Laura:** Second. Approved unanimously.

Russ Bailey will join the Commission.

Kurt Moser, Four Mile Run Park, offers to do a kayak tour – ABC members welcome to opt in.

Phil Jubert mentioned to Eleanor T. that when the City removes wood, he'd like to make it available in a central location, where people (artisans, anyone) can pick up what they like and make furniture, art, etc. Everyone liked that idea.

Meeting ended at 8:57pm.

ABC MISSION: The Alexandria Beautification Commission was established by the City to advise City Council and citizens on all matters related to City beautification.

ABC GOALS

1. Inspire beautification through the awards program.
2. Promote environmental sustainability through collaboration and engagement with City Council, City staff, and private organizations.
3. Educate local community on beautification and sustainability best practices.

“Though the word beautification makes the concept sound merely cosmetic, it involves much more: clean water, clean air, clean roadsides, safe waste disposal and preservation of valued old landmarks as well as great parks and wilderness areas. To me ... beautification means our total concern for the physical and human quality we pass on to our children and the future.”
Lady Bird Johnson